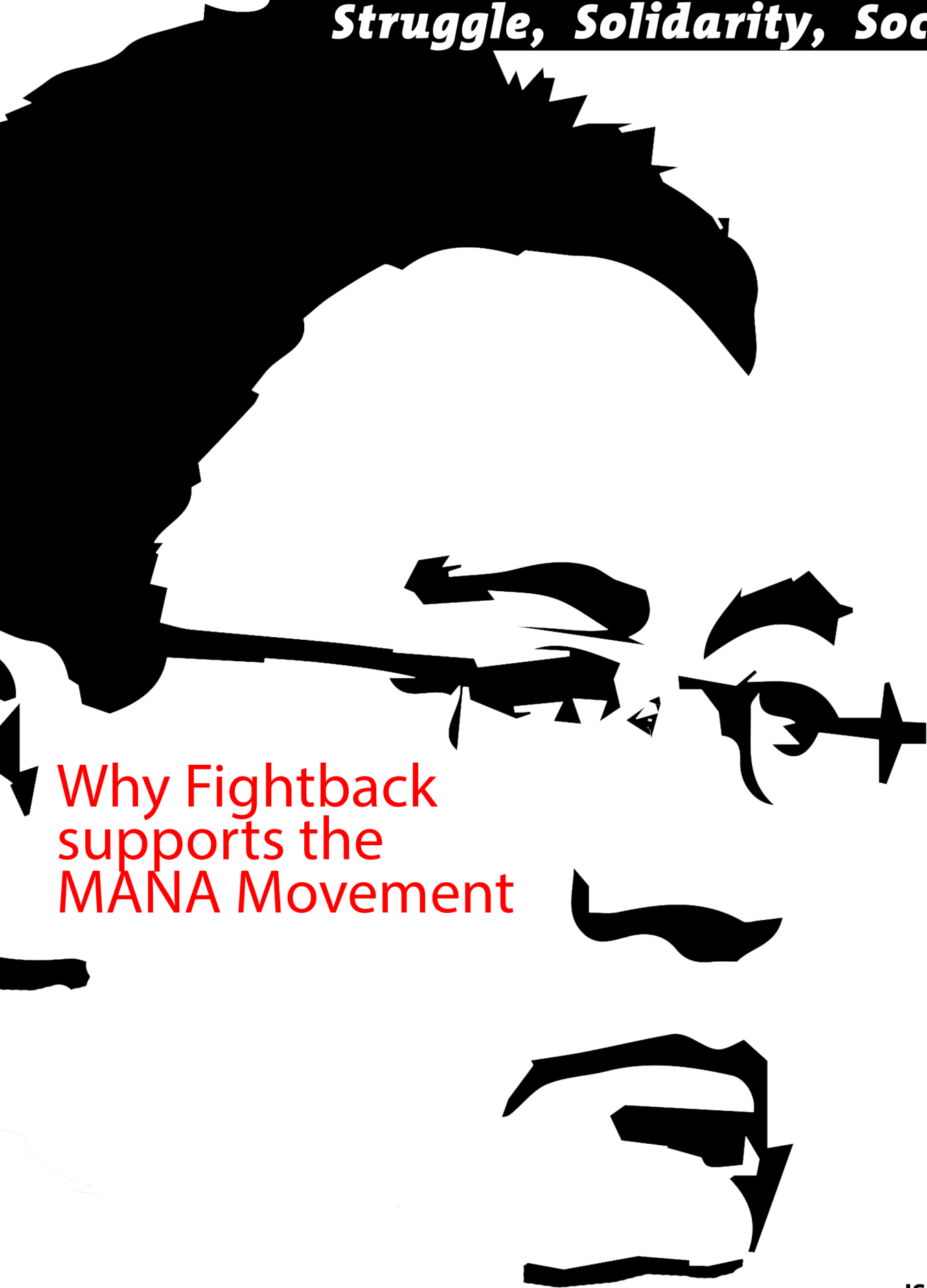


# Fightback

Issue #5

2014

*Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism*



Why Fightback  
supports the  
MANA Movement

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# Publication information

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## Donations and bequeathments

Fightback is non-profit and relies on financial support from progressive people, supporters and members for all its activities including producing this magazine. To financially support us please deposit to 38-9002-0817250-01 with your initials and surname (or anonymous.) Large and small, regular and one-off donations are all appreciated and listed in Fightback from time to time.

Fightback magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

## About Fightback

Under our current system, democracy consists of a vote every 3 years. Most of our lives are lived under dictatorship, the dictatorship of bosses and WINZ case managers. Fightback stands for a system in which our workplaces, our schools, our universities are run democratically, for social need rather than private profit.

Fightback participates in the MANA Movement, whose stated mission is to bring “rangatiratanga to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed.” Capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa through colonisation, and the fight for indigenous self-determination is intimately connected with the fight for an egalitarian society. We also maintain an independent Marxist organisation outside of parliament, to offer a vision of a world beyond the parliamentary capitalist system.

Fightback stands against all forms of oppression. We believe working-class power, the struggle of the majority for self-determination, is the basis for ending all forms of oppression. However, we also recognise that daily inequities such as sexism must be addressed here and now, not just after the revolution.

Fightback is embedded in a range of struggles on the ground; including building a fighting trade union movement, movements for gender and sexual liberation, and anti-racism.

Fightback also publishes a monthly magazine, and a website, to offer a socialist perspective on ongoing struggles.

Fightback stands for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

## Editorial

As we go to press, it seems increasingly likely that the *The New Zealand Herald* – and the rest of the mainstream media – recently ended up with egg on their face in regard to the Donghung Liu affair. The mainstream media are increasingly open about their preference for coverage of politics which turns it into a simple horse-race between two teams of celebrities. The modern media, pushed by commercial pressures into an arms-race to grab attention, has no time for real news and analysis. This is why we publish *Fightback*. We need an analytical media, and a socialist media. We need a media which tries to explain news and issues, not only in a form that ordinary people can grasp, but in a form that ordinary people can use. If you understand how the bug-gers get away with it, then you can more effectively fight against them. This issue is mainly devoted to a round-up of our very successful *Capitalism: Not Our Future* conference. In particular we concentrate on issues which are still woefully overlooked in a lot of socialist writing. Sionnain Byrnes and Bronwen Beechey provide excellent write-ups from the panel discussions on Gender and Ecosocialism at our conference. Also on the topic of women's liberation is an article on women's contribution to New Zealand's 1890 maritime strike. Another issue which should be of strategic interest for all socialists – but has not been – is the internet.

Mobile and digital technology offers unprecedented possibilities for freedom of speech, education and opportunities for employment for all working people. But these possibilities of freedom in the new technology are threatened by the governments and large corporations. We deal in this issue with how copyright and “anti-piracy” laws only benefit the big corporations, at the expense of both consumers and creatives.

Of course, this is an issue dear to the heart of the Internet Party. On this subject, it is also very important for socialists to not only be able to admit mistakes, but to analyse them and seek to improve them. In our April issue, we declared ourselves against the MANA movement's electoral alliance with the Internet Party. At the conference, we decided that we had made that decision for the wrong reasons, and reversed it. A statement by Fightback explains why, and other articles explain – once again – how MANA is the party where socialists should be struggling right now.

We want to encourage all our readers – online or on paper – to donate to *Fightback* or to take out a subscription. An independent socialist press will only survive if it is useful enough to its readers that they will not only read, but write for and financially support us. Your contribution will determine whether we can continue our work.

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# CAPITALISM: NOT OUR FUTURE

A CONFERENCE ON STRUGGLE, SOLIDARITY AND SOCIALISM



## Capitalism: Not Our Future conference report

More than 100 people packed into the activist space at 19 Tory Street in Wellington, to discuss struggle, solidarity and socialism on Queen's Birthday weekend. The occasion was the *Capitalism: Not Our Future* conference, hosted by Fightback.

The conference came on the back of the growing development of the electoral alliance between the MANA Movement (of which Fightback is a part) and the Internet Party (IP), and the announcement of former Alliance cabinet minister Laila Harré as the IP's leader. Given this theme, the choice of the opening night presentation – “Elections and Community Struggle” – was a pressing one for all socialists.

For this and many other reasons, contributions from MANA leaders Hone Harawira and Annette Sykes were

highlights of the weekend. The conference was also honoured by overseas guest Sue Bolton, local councillor in Moreland (Melbourne) and Socialist Alliance activist.

Other important guest panellists were Gayaal Iddamalgoda from the International Socialist Organisation; poet and lecturer Teresia Teaiwa, who discussed gender and decolonisation; climate scientist Simon Fullick; and Mike Treen, general secretary of the UNITE union, who gave a presentation on the Marxist theory of crisis.

From Fightback, Grant Brookes discussed “Tino Rangitaratanga – What's it got to do with Pākehā”; Heleyni Pratley reported on her recent visit to New York for a global fast-food workers' organising convention; and Wei Sun talked about her experiences as a

migrant worker.

The conference was a huge success, both in terms of attendance and political content. Attendees enjoyed a spirit of open and frank debate, in which contributions from the floor were relevant and comradely and real discussion was possible with the visiting speakers. Generous donations from attendees raised \$1300, more than enough to cover costs.

At a members-only meeting after the conclusion of the conference, Fightback made the following decisions:

- to reaffirm its commitment to the MANA movement;
- to affirm its commitment to socialist feminism, and to create a Socialist-Feminist caucus within Fightback.



# Fightback 2014 Educational Conference: Gender and Women's Liberation Panel



Teresia Teawa (l) and Kassie Hartendoorp at the Fightback conference.

# Fightback

*By Sionainn Byrnes, member of Fightback and UC FemSoc*

For many socialist organisations, the task of orienting, and indeed incorporating the struggle for gender equality – and women’s liberation, in particular – has proved both ideologically and practically fraught. A lack of meaningful dialogue, and the dominant perception of a universal (masculine) working class, has meant that the productive overlap between the two – admittedly diverse – positions has remained largely unexplored. Yet, within New Zealand (and around the world) we are witnessing the radical regeneration of both socialist and feminist perspectives – an intersectional consciousness taking root in our communities, and on our campuses, for example. Fittingly, the 2014 Fightback Educational Conference, perhaps resulting from a mixture of serendipity and a concerted effort on Fightback’s behalf to commit to a socialist feminist ethic, strongly emphasized the shared elements and interconnectedness of the oppressions experienced by the working classes, women, and LGBTQ+ communities under capitalism.

Not to be outshone by the empowering and inspiring opening speech by Mana MP Annette Sykes, and by the equally empowering and thoughtful wahine in attendance, Kassie Hartendorp, Daphne Lawless, and Teresia Teaiwa delivered what I have no qualms in calling the most engaging panel of the weekend: ‘Gender and Women’s Liberation’. Kassie’s discussion, ‘Socialist Feminism 101’, served as a broad, but much needed, introduction to both socialism and feminism, and highlighted the positive overlap between the two perspectives. Kassie convincingly demonstrated the ways in which each position could ‘illuminate the blind spots of the other’ – socialism offering a lens to analyse and redress class issues within various feminist movements, and feminism as a means of connecting to, and engaging with, the unique oppressions

experienced by women and non-binary individuals under a capitalist system.

Daphne’s presentation, ‘Gender Diversity and Capitalism’, expanded on this introduction, and moved into the realm of gender policing, and the commodification of gender under capitalism. In illustrating the ways in which capitalism controls the expression of gender through the production and consumption of acceptable male and female identities (in the form of various products – cosmetics, food, and clothing being obvious examples), Daphne exposed the means by which capitalism is implicated in the oppression of women, and the overwhelming suppression of individuals on the non-binary gender spectrum. Daphne argued that gender, like all commodities, is sold to us within a capitalist framework.

Daphne also connected the struggle for transgendered actualization to capitalist structures by underlining the centrality of gender realignment surgery to trans\* recognition and legitimacy within Western culture – showing us how this kind of actualization is financially inaccessible to many people, and thus discriminatory on a class level, and how blatantly uncomfortable our overarching system of organization is with individuals who do not conform to the male/female binary. Daphne further critiqued the prevalent ‘lean in’ brand of capitalist feminism espoused by individuals such as Sheryl Sandberg

Finally, in ‘Gender and Decolonisation’, Teresia, a poet and senior lecturer in Pacific Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, discussed the continued imperialism evident within mainstream feminist movements. Teresia used the recent ‘#Bring Back Our Girls’ campaign as an example of the way that Western feminism co-opts, universalises, and erases the struggles of ethnic and indigenous women. Looking to the power in language, Teresia questioned who and what ‘our’ girls really means, and explained the difference between standing in solidarity as an ally with

women around the globe, as opposed to moderating and speaking for these women, their movements, and their issues.

Turning her attention to the Pacific, Teresia described thoughtfully the effect that Western feminism is having on indigenous women’s movements, preventing, in some ways, the imagination and implementation of unique and culturally appropriate feminist positions. Teresia’s talk gave attendees, particularly those of a feminist persuasion, much to think about in terms of the way that they pursue and frame struggles for gender equality and women’s liberation – considerations that are particularly relevant to the nascent formation of a so-called ‘Fourth Wave’ of feminism.

The ‘Gender and Women’s Liberation’ panel was, ultimately, a timely reminder of the need for an intersectional socialist movement – one that incorporates, respects, and engages with the unique experiences of men, women, and non-binary individuals under capitalism. It reflected Fightback’s recent commitment to a socialist feminist ethic, and laid the foundations for a radical socialist feminist consciousness within New Zealand.



## Why Fightback supports the MANA Movement



MANA leader Hone Harawira, President Annette Sykes and Ikaroa Rawhiti candidate Te Hamua Nikora

The decision by the MANA Movement to enter into a formal alliance with the Internet Party has drawn criticism from right and left. Fightback has voiced criticism of our own.

In our April editorial, we said that “Fightback opposes any close ties between the Internet Party and the MANA Movement”. We added: “Fightback also opposes MANA entering a coalition government with pro-capitalist parties”.

We argued that the Internet Party “is more or less a front for millionaire Kim Dotcom”, that the “Internet Party’s politics are extremely vague and no candidates have yet been revealed” and that “there is no sign that it represents a progressive force.”

We were wrong.

Even as we criticised moves towards the alliance back in April, however, we did reaffirm that “whatever MANA decides on this issue, Fightback will continue to belong to and support the movement, as long as policies and principles are not sacrificed”.

At our national conference in Wellington on 2 June, Fightback members voted unanimously that we should remain in MANA. As a contribution to the public debate over MANA’s new

direction, we would like to restate why we support the Movement, including its decision to join the Internet MANA alliance.

Fightback decided to participate in MANA back in 2011. “What makes Mana an important progressive force”, we wrote at the time, “is the interface of its class composition, its leadership, its policy, its democratic space, and the class/community outlook of the non-socialist activists involved, who are the majority of the party membership”.

The “democratic space” within MANA, and the role of the leadership in maintaining it, were clearly displayed during the negotiations with the Internet Party.

“Democracy” within a kaupapa Māori movement does not always look the same as it does in a European context. Nor should it. But party leader Hone Harawira announced in April that “it will be the membership and not the leadership, who will make the final decision on any possible arrangements” (MANA – and, or, or not – Dotcom).

Despite criticisms from some on the left about “authoritarian” leadership in MANA, it was our experience that branches thoroughly debated the pros and cons of the alliance. Where opinion was divided, members voted. The deci-

sion to enter into the alliance reflected the democratic will of the membership.

It has become clear to us that the Internet Party is not “a front for millionaire Kim Dotcom”. MANA has also had influence, for example in the choice of party leader. Laila Harré, a former cabinet minister from 1999-2002, championed paid parental leave and caused controversy by joining a picket line of striking journalists. After stepping down as Alliance Party leader in 2003, she went on to head the Nurses Organisation’s historic “Fair Pay Campaign” and then the National Distribution Union (part of FIRST Union today). As a left-wing and pro-union leader of the Internet Party, Harré has already influenced candidate selection and party policies.

So we can now see many signs that the Internet Party “represents a progressive force” and is a legitimate political ally.

From its foundation, MANA has sought to broaden out its main support base among Māori in Te Tai Tokerau to include progressive Pākehā, tagata Pasifika and other tau iwi. At the 2011 general election, MANA stood Pākehā and Pasifika candidates in general seats, including Sue Bradford, John Minto and James Papali’i. But this strategy did not succeed. The alliance with a new, progressive force – the Internet Party

# MANA Movement

– simply represents another strategy to achieve MANA's original vision.

Critics of the alliance have also claimed that MANA is “selling out”, trading its principles or its ability to bring in list MPs on its “coat tails”, in return for Dotcom's cash. Ironically, this attack comes mainly from parties to the right of MANA, who happily accept corporate donations and “game the system” all the time.

But MANA's policies for the 2014 election, to be released soon, will reflect even more strongly the principles of uplifting Māori and the poor. The agreement with the Internet Party guarantees MANA's policy independence. Meanwhile, the more MPs that MANA can help to elect, the greater the chance of changing the government.

MANA also remains committed to the goal of changing the world – a

goal broadly shared by Fightback. At the party's AGM in April, president Annette Sykes outlined “rules of engagement” for dealing with all other parties. We will not work with a party that maintains the status quo, she said, or one with incompatible policies or people. We will only work with another party if it does not compromise MANA's values. Fightback supports the view that MANA should allow Labour to form a government in September, but not join it. Staying outside of capitalist coalitions is necessary for MANA to keep playing the role described by Hone Harawira – being “the independent voice for Maori, the fighter for te pani me te rawakore (the poor and the dispossessed)”.

Fightback's ongoing commitment to MANA reflects a long-term perspective about the importance of linking the fight for indigenous self-determination

and the socialist struggle for an egalitarian society in Aotearoa.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see some reasons why we were mistaken in our earlier assessment of the Internet Party alliance. Hone Harawira pursued the opportunity of the alliance from the outset. Many of the MANA members who supported the idea had come to know Hone through whanau connections and decades of shared struggle, and developed deep trust in his political judgement. Fightback, as an organisation made up of mainly young, Pākehā members, do not yet have the benefit of this experience.

Finally, therefore, Fightback will continue to belong to and support the MANA Movement in order to gain experience and learn, so we can better contribute to the struggle for a world beyond the parliamentary capitalist system.

## “No socialism on a dead planet”: Ecosocialism, an overview.

*By Bronwen Beechey (Fightback) – from notes made for a talk to the Fightback Capitalism: Not Our Future conference, Wellington, NZ, June 2014*

Why ecosocialism? For most socialists the reasons are pretty obvious. To quote Alexandre Costa, a Marxist and Professor of Atmospheric Science in Brazil:

“We insist that seeking answers to the central question of the ecological crisis in general (and in particular the climate crisis) is crucial to the struggle of the working classes and the poor in the 21st century. After all, the fight to avoid a catastrophic outcome to this crisis engendered by capitalism is the fight to safeguard the material conditions for survival with dignity of humankind. ... Socialism is not

possible on a scorched Earth.”

However, not all socialists are convinced by this, and it would be fair to say that many environmental activists are suspicious of socialism, with some justification. It has become obvious to many that neo-liberal capitalism and environmental destruction go hand in hand. But the mainstream environmental movement, and most Green parties, including NZ's, are only challenging the worst aspects of capitalism, believing that some form of “greening” capitalism is possible. Ecosocialism has developed as an alternative to the mainstream environmental movement's emphasis on “greenwashing”, middle-class consumer activism and acceptance of the profit motive.

The stakes couldn't be higher. While we bicker, the global environment is in crisis. In the last few weeks, it has been

reported that according to two independent studies by climate scientists, the West Antarctic Ice Sheet is losing twice as much ice now as the last time it was surveyed, and its collapse may now be irreversible. It would cause a sea level rise of three metres. This is a climate tipping point – a critical point in the Earth's system that when crossed, will mean the climate can spiral out of control, beyond the point of no return. This doesn't mean it is all over. It does mean we have irreversibly and dangerously changed the climate, and that we, and future generations, will live with the consequences.

### Marx and Engels: green before it was cool

Ecosocialism is not so much a “revision” of Marxist theory as a reinstatement of elements that have previously been



## CODE GREEN

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downplayed or ignored. In the words of British ecosocialist Derek Wall, “unlike 20th century interpretations of socialism, ecosocialism places Marx at the centre of its analysis.”

While Karl Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels are famous for their analysis of capitalism and call for social revolution, they are far less known for their ecological thinking, which held that capitalism inevitably tears apart the natural conditions that sustain life.

This can be seen from Engels’ early concern with river pollution and his analysis in *The Condition of the English Working Class* of how industrial pollution harmed workers, right through to Marx’s writings at the end of his life where he plunged into the study of indigenous societies.

Marx’s two most important ecological insights were “the treadmill of

production” and “the metabolic rift”. The treadmill of production refers to capital’s impulse to unlimited expansion, its relentless drive to increase profits, regardless of the ecosphere’s natural limits.

In nature, there is no such thing as waste. Nature is a circular system where everything is recycled. This is the opposite of capitalism’s linear, treadmill economy, which overloads natural systems with ever-growing amounts of waste products: waste gases into the sky, waste pollutants into water, and waste chemicals and toxins into the soil.

The metabolic rift refers to Marx’s theory that capitalist production for profit creates a sharp break in what Marx called the metabolism — the crucial interdependency of nature and human society. Marx arrived at this conclusion from his research into how industrial agriculture tended to reduce

fertility, depriving the soil and the workers of nourishment and sustenance.

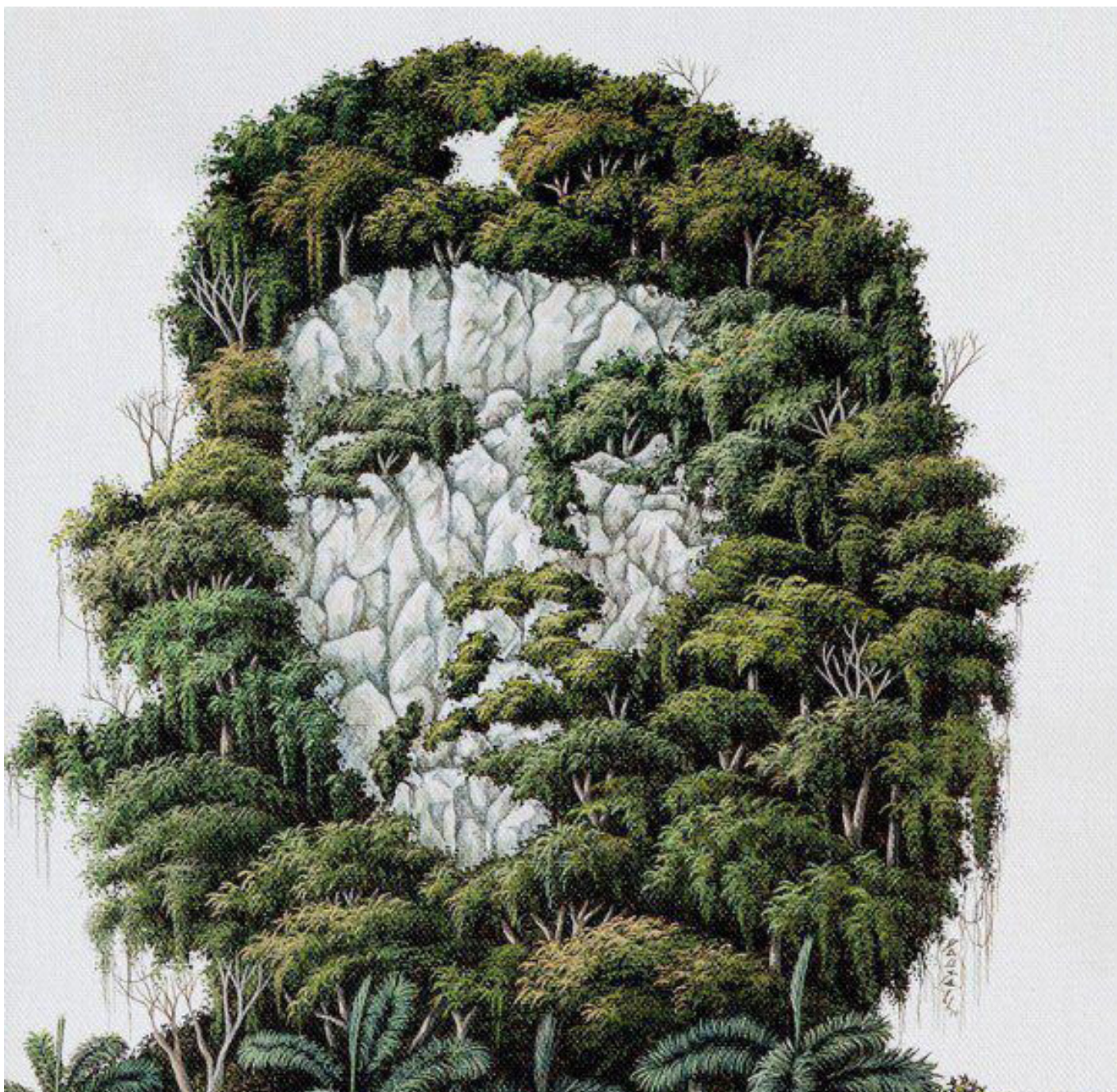
But Marx also understood the concept of the metabolic rift on a global scale, as colonies in the global South had their natural resources and soil fertility plundered to support Western capitalist development — an imperialist project that continues today.

Healing this rift and building a truly sustainable society was a central goal in Marx’s vision of a democratic socialist future. In the third volume of *Capital* he said:

“Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the Earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations as



# Eco-socialism



boni patres familias [good heads of the household].”

Engels, in *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*, said that capitalism helped destroy the natural world because “in relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, the most tangible result”.

Another important concept of Marx’s was that of democratic property rights, the commons. Communities, including indigenous and peasant farmers, have collectively regulated resources includ-

ing land, forests and fisheries for thousands of years. Under capitalism, these resources were seized for private ownership and exploited for profit, resulting in waste and destruction.

Derek Wall has written extensively about how the concept of “the commons” provides the basis for an alternative, ecological economy that is democratic, resource-efficient, decentralised and sustainable. He says:

“To me, ecosocialism is about defending, extending and deepening commons. Cyberspace is to a

large extent commons. The wiki principle is commons. Collective, creative solutions are possible. While commons work at a community level, with the web we can nest commons and use wiki principles to democratically plan regional, national and international economies.”

## The movement and the problem today

However, it is with good reason that French Marxist Michael Lowy has said



the “ecological question ... poses the *major challenge* to a renewal of Marxist thought”. Typically, Marxists in the 20th century, even of the anti-Stalinist variety, held to a “productivist” vision of change, whereby increasing the level of the productive forces inherited from capitalism was considered the path to social progress. Technology was wrongly assumed to be class-neutral, rather than historically and socially determined.

This history makes the concept of ecosocialism doubly important. Canadian ecosocialist Ian Angus has said that “ecosocialism begins with a critique of its two parents, ecology and Marxism.” It seeks to combine the best insights of ecology, which says human actions can undermine the basis of life, with Marxism’s critique of capitalism — a system based on the dual exploitation of labour and nature.

Published in 1962, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* is often hailed as the inspiration for the contemporary ecology and environmental movement. Carson’s work demonstrated that synthetic pesticides widely used in agriculture could cause cancer and that their agricultural use was a threat to wildlife, particularly to birds. Years after Carson’s death in 1964, the use of DDT and other pesticides was banned in the US. The first Earth Day was held in the US in 1970. Since then, governments and international bodies have been forced to place environmental issues on their agendas.

In New Zealand, the modern environmental movement started in the late 1960’s with the campaign to save Lake Manapouri, and continued with successful campaigns against nuclear power and visits by nuclear warships, preventing logging of native forests, and halting the growing of genetically engineered food crops. More recently, there have been campaigns against proposals to open up national parks to mining exploration and against deep sea oil. The New Zealand environmental movement was responsible for the formation of the Values Party, one of the first political

## Why you should get involved in Fightback

### We have an internationalist perspective

Workers all over the world have far more in common with one another than with the bosses of “their own” country. To fight effectively, workers in every country must support the struggles of workers in every other country. This is what we mean by internationalism. We are for open borders as the best way to unite the

workers of the world. We have been involved in successful campaigns to prevent the deportation of refugees and we urge the union movement to be migrant-worker friendly. We oppose the reactionary nationalism of campaigns like “Buy NZ-made”, and instead advocate protecting jobs through militant unionism.

### We oppose imperialism

The fight against imperialism is a vital part of the fight against capitalism. Imperialism is the system whereby rich countries dominate poor ones. New Zealand is a junior partner in the world imperialist system. Fightback opposes any involvement in imperialist wars such as those being fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, even if the involvement is under the banner of so-called “peace-keeping”. We demand an immediate end to the interference

in the affairs of Pacific Island nations by New Zealand and its ally Australia. We want an end to all involvement in imperialist military alliances and the dismantling of their spy bases. We try to identify the most politically progressive anti-imperialist groups to offer them our active support.

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# Eco-socialism

parties to campaign on around environmental issues, and later the Green Party. The environmental movement that grew in the late 1960s was part of the radicalisation of young people that included challenged many aspects of capitalism – war, racism, sexism and so on. Many of these activists became part of a growing socialist movement, and these young ecosocialists struggled against the regressive ideas which sometimes emerge in ecological thought.

For example, many of the writings that helped spur the early environmental movement, such as *The Limits to Growth* and *The Population Bomb* saw population growth, particularly in underdeveloped countries, as the cause of environmental destruction. This argument has been around since Thomas Malthus published *An Essay on the Principles of Population* in 1798 and is one of the fundamental points of difference between ecosocialism and other forms of environmentalism. Barry Commoner's 1971 book, *The Closing Circle*, was a left-wing rebuttal of populationist arguments, arguing that capitalist technologies, rather than population pressures, were responsible for environmental degradation.

In 1979, Australian Marxist Alan Roberts published *The Self-Managing Environment*, which suggested that consumerism was fuelled by people's unfulfilled needs. Derek Wall, in an interview in 2011, credits this book as being his first introduction to ecosocialist ideas. A key development in the 1980s was the creation of the journal *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* with the first issue in 1988, and still published today.

The 1990s saw two socialist feminists, Mary Mellor and Ariel Salleh, address environmental issues within an ecosocialist and feminist framework. Both posited a materialist form of ecofeminism which showed how women's unpaid reproductive and domestic labour was an essential part of maintaining capitalism, rather than idealist versions of ecofeminism which projected an es-

sentialist view of women as being "closer to nature" due to their role as childbearers.

From the 1990s onward, ecosocialists engaged enthusiastically with the growing anti-globalisation movements of the global South, which later spread to the metropolitan centres of the North with mass protests at meetings of the World Trade Organisation, World Bank and IMF. These protests combined ecological awareness and social justice, focusing particularly on the effect of globalisation on the poor and workers.

In 2001, Joel Kovel, a social scientist, psychiatrist and former candidate for the US Green Party Presidential nomination in 2000, and Michael Löwy, an anthropologist and member of the Trotskyist Fourth International, released *An Ecosocialist Manifesto*, which has been adopted by some organisations and suggests possible routes for the growth of eco-socialist consciousness.

The manifesto states:

"We believe that the present capitalist system cannot regulate, much less overcome, the crises it has set going. It cannot solve the ecological crisis because to do so requires setting limits upon accumulation—an unacceptable option for a system predicated upon the rule: Grow or Die!"

In 2007, the Ecosocialist International Network was founded in Paris. The meeting attracted more than 60 activists from Europe, Latin America, the US, Canada, the UK and Australia. A committee was set up by the Paris conference to draft an ecosocialist declaration, which was signed by more than 400 individuals and organisations from around the world. It was distributed as part of the official launching of the Ecosocialist International Network at the World Social Forum in Belem, Brazil, in 2009. The Belem Declaration, which issued from this conference, stated:

"Ecosocialism is grounded in a transformed economy founded on the non-monetary values of social justice and ecological balance. It criticizes both capitalist 'market ecology' and productivist socialism, which ignored the earth's equilibrium and limits. It redefines the path and goal of socialism within an ecological and democratic framework."

Here in NZ, ecosocialism was first adopted by Socialist Worker New Zealand. In 2009, the SW-NZ central committee collectively signed the Belem Declaration, and set up the Ecosocialism Aotearoa Facebook group. In 2010, an issue of SW's *UNITY* journal was dedicated to the theme of Ecosocialism, and in 2011 the organisation began the work of establishing a local Ecosocialist Network, just before it dissolved itself in 2012.

SW/NZ member Peter de Waal came up with the concept of the "PERIL syndrome". PERIL here stands for five integrated crises that capitalism faces at the current time: crises of profitability, ecology, resources, imperialism, and legitimacy.

This combination of crises suggests that the global capitalist order is now fragile in a way it has not been since the Second World War. Some theorists – like the New Zealand socialist Grant Morgan or the Russian-American Dmitry Orlov – have gone as far as to argue that global capitalism is doomed to collapse within a few decades.

However, ecosocialism doesn't necessarily hold to this apocalyptic scenario. Whether globalised capitalism is sustainable – and what social order or orders might replace it – is a question which has an objective as well as a subjective factor. The crises mean that the global order must change and compensate – but the balance of class forces will determine exactly how that comes about. Building a fightback against capitalism is vital to ensure that the 99% don't end



Bolivian president Evo Morales

up paying for the destruction caused by the 1%.

## Actually existing ecosocialism

I want to finish by looking at the countries where ecosocialism is being put into practice – Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba.

Following the election of Evo Morales to the presidency of Bolivia in 2005, a new constitution was drafted and adopted in 2009. It was the first constitution in the world to include environmental and socialist principles. In 2010, the government of Bolivia hosted the World People's Conference on Climate Change in the city of Cochabamba. It was attended by around 30,000 people from 6 continents.

In December 2010, the Bolivian parliament passed the Law on the Rights of Mother Earth, in which Mother Earth (or Pachamama, in indigenous Andean cultures) is defined as "...the dynamic living system formed by the indivisible community of all life systems and living beings whom are interrelated, interdependent, and complementary, which share a common destiny"; adding that "Mother Earth is considered sacred in the worldview of Indigenous peoples and nations. It is the first piece of legislation in which the Earth is given a legal

identity.

Speaking at the December 2009 Copenhagen climate summit, the late Hugo Chavez, president of Venezuela, said: "If the climate were one of the biggest capitalist banks, the rich governments would have saved it." Under the leadership of Chavez, the Venezuelan government took a number of important environmental steps, including the provision at no cost of energy-efficient light bulbs to all households, and using oil revenue to massively expand the rail system in Caracas. Another important green initiative was Misión Arbol, which in 2007 aimed to collect in five years 30 tons of seeds, plant 100 million plants, and reforest 150,000 hectares of land. When I went to Venezuela in 2011 as part of a solidarity tour, we visited a large organic city farm in the centre of Caracas that is situated on the former carpark of the Hilton Hotel.

In April this year, Chavez's successor as president, Nicolas Maduro, announced additional funding of Bs40m (around \$A6.75m) for Mission Arbol to continue its work, and a new education program, named the "Hugo Chavez National School of Eco-socialist Leaders", will teach volunteers how to better care for the environment.

In the Worldwide Fund for Nature's 2007 report, Cuba was the only country listed as having an ecologically sustain-

able economy. Cuba was faced with a crisis in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union deprived it of its oil supplies. According to Cuban permaculturist Roberto Perez, "We needed to live as best as possible with less energy and resources. We learned to do a lot of things with almost nothing."

Food production was transformed to a low-input and environmentally friendly system which included organic farming, urban agriculture and permaculture. Industries that were not energy efficient were dismantled; workers in those industries were moved to other sectors or paid their previous salary to study. In parts of the country energy was produced from bagasse, the biomass left after the processing of sugar cane. Even after the Venezuelan revolution provided Cuba with reasonably priced oil, the commitment to a sustainable energy policy continues.

I am not claiming that things are perfect in those countries. But if these small countries, still suffering from the effects of colonialism and exploitation, can achieve these things, imagine what could be achieved in the so-called advanced countries if the same commitment by governments existed. What these countries have in common is a system that puts people and planet before profit.



# MANA Movement

## MANA and Industrial Policy: “Between equal rights, force decides”

*Fightback participates in the MANA Movement, whose stated mission is to bring “rangatiratanga to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed.” Capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa through colonisation, and the fight for indigenous self-determination is intimately connected with the fight for an egalitarian society.*

*Leading up to the election, we will be examining the major policies that have been developed within MANA over the last three years. As members of MANA we have been a part of the critical (and sometimes heated) discussions at branch, rohe and national levels, discussing what these policy areas mean as well as what is needed to bring about these radical changes.*

*This article by Joel Cosgrove (Fightback) examines MANA's Industrial Relations policy in relation to wider struggles.*

Industrial relations are an essential area of struggle. The workplace – the “point of production” (the space where decisions about what is produced are made) is a primary site of struggle between workers and bosses. The right to strike, the right to organize and the right to associate have been resisted by bosses and their organisations and fought for by workers.

Youth rates, (low) minimum wages and the gender pay gap, are all structural tools that drag down wages as a whole.

Anyone who has worked in the jobs that generally pay youth rates (supermarkets, fast food, retail etc) knows that the work done, whether by a 17 year old or a 19 year old, is no different. Historically it used to be argued that women couldn't work as hard as men, or do jobs that involved complicated thinking. The point of these claims is an attempt to

undermine our pay rates.

Even when the working class is successful in winning gains, the bosses will constantly try to claw them back. Currently in Australia, weekend work is paid out at time and a half (150% of normal pay) and the Abbott government are trying to undermine that by drawing it down to time and a quarter (125%) Restaurant & Catering Australia CEO John Hart has been quoted as saying:

“The industry will most likely save about \$112 million each year - with this decision ensuring the industry continues to push for further penalty rate reforms under the Fair Work Commission four-yearly review of Modern Awards.”

Of course, NZ workers have already lost penalty rates for working weekends or after hours.

The battle between workers and bosses is a battle for the profit created through the work of workers and it is at this point, over the pay and conditions that bosses are forced to pay, that the struggle is fiercest.

This is why MANA's policies around ending the 90 day trial period, youth rates and extending paid parental leave to one year are important elements in a fightback. Supporting gender pay and employment equity is another important aspect of this policy, with the case based on Kristine Bartlett's claim that caregivers (made up of 92% women) being paid at just above the minimum wage demonstrates a gender bias against women currently going through the Court of Appeal.

Aotearoa is a nation framed by overwork or underwork. On average according to the OECD, New Zealanders work 1,762 hours a year compared to

places like Germany and Netherlands who work 1,397 and 1,381 hours per year respectively. When you compare the average wages of the respective countries you find that Germans earn \$US30,721; the Dutch \$US25,697; and New Zealanders \$US21,773. Yet polling company Roy Morgan report the unemployment rate as being 8.5% (compared to an official rate of 6%), with a further 11.3% under-employed. Collectively, 19.8% of the workforce (or around 519,000 people) were either unemployed or under-employed.

British think tank New Economics Foundation has outlined a plan where the average working week is 21 hours a week, almost halving hours worked, while maintaining wages through increased taxation and a number of other measures. The question remaining is how this political change would actually be brought about. As Canadian ecosocialist Ian Angus says, change will not happen just because it is the right thing to do.

Mana's policies around this area include initially strengthening a return to a 40 hour week and restoring penal rates for those working for over 40 hours a week or 8 hours a day; increasing sick days from five to ten; and bringing in a minimum redundancy payment of six weeks' pay for the first year of employment and two weeks' pay for each subsequent year of employment. The initial aim of these reforms is to make it more expensive for employers to make workers bear the brunt of any changes they make. Employers in Aotearoa have a history of exacting cuts in pay and conditions of employees to increase their rate of profit. Unite Union head Mike Treen has pointed to workers' productivity increasing by 83% while real wages (inflation adjusted) fell by 25%. This is the result



# MANA Movement



of weak defences of workers' conditions around hours and penal rates.

Competition between companies over the past few decades has centred on who can cut workers' pay and conditions the most. In the past industry conditions (or awards) set out minimum conditions and pay that in part functioned to undermine the ability to cut them - the minimum wage is an example of this in action. This is another area covered in MANA's policy, setting out industry awards/minimum conditions as well as making sure that workers performing any outsourced government services are not employed in worse conditions than those in government, something which is currently endemic with cleaners' contracts.

As good as these various policies are, they rely on the workers to uphold and push them forward, and to punish employers who break them. The right to strike is central to this. Workers en masse downing tools and stopping production cuts to the chase and forces

the issue. The right to strike has been progressively cut back over the years, until in almost all situations it is illegal to strike. MANA policy puts forward "the right to strike for workers to enforce their contract and on any significant political, economic, cultural and environmental issues. The policy extends the right to strike to these issues but also gives an example of "workers for Fisher and Paykel in New Zealand taking action in support of Fisher and Paykel employees in Thailand", an important aspect of internationalism also demonstrated by the worldwide protests around the world recently in May against McDonalds' global anti-worker policies.

Yet it was Karl Marx who said "between two equal rights, force is the arbiter", namely the right of employers to legally undermine workers conditions and workers fight for improved conditions. For example, from 1990 to 1999 the minimum wage moved from \$6.13 to \$7.00 and from 2000-2009 the

minimum wage increased from \$7.00 to \$12.50. That the National party (who increased it in the 1990s by 87 cents) have increased the minimum wage since 2008 by \$1.75 is something worth investigating further. The difference is the mass struggle that was waged in the 2000's, particularly by Unite Union, which forced the political situation to change - to the point where the National party felt they had to increase the minimum wage each year (in the face of opposition from their own supporters).

What we can see from all this is that these rights are not given, they're fought for. MANA might have an excellent industrial policy, but actually bringing this about will be a massive struggle. There are already examples that show how struggle can be waged to win these conditions. We need to learn from them and develop new and creative ways to push forward the fight for a fairer and egalitarian society that benefits the many and not the few.

## MANA gets it right on Pacific migration

By Byron Clark (*Fightback*).

Following questions directed at Immigration Minister Michael Woodhouse from opposition MPs and media regarding a meeting with businessman and National Party donor Donghua Liu, who in Woodhouse's words "had ideas about investor policies and his experience as a migrant coming in," Woodhouse rejected the idea that the meeting was controversial, claiming there were "hundreds of examples" of people who don't donate to political parties who have access to him and other ministers.

The MANA movement responded by issuing a press release inviting the minister to make a house call "to discuss the matter of a struggling family of three children, one of whom has a medical condition which a medical expert said would be exacerbated in a hot Pacific climate and advised strongly against the child being forced to live there."

Significant was the statement from MANA co-president John Minto: "MANA wants to discuss with the Minister why the government discriminates against Pacific people from Tonga and Samoa while it puts out the welcome mat for anyone from Australia – irrespective of skills or any other criteria. An Australian can get off the plane, get a job and no-one bats an eyelid but Tongan and Samoan people face demeaning discrimination to enter New Zealand."

While locally there isn't a groundswell of support for opening New Zealand's borders to people from the Pacific, regional labour mobility has been a key demand of Pacific countries in the ongoing negotiations for a successor to the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER). "The reality is

that without substantive commitments on labour mobility and development assistance, [Australia and New Zealand] will be the major beneficiaries of this Agreement." Robert Sisilo, Lead Spokesperson for the Forum Island Countries (FICs) told the Solomon Star News on May 5th.

"We have three main demands on labour mobility, namely the legal certainty of the RSE and SWP labour schemes,



Robert Sisilo

removal of the caps or increasing the current numbers and to include employment sectors in which the FICs have a comparative advantage such as health-care and construction."

The Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme allows workers from a number of Pacific countries to come to New Zealand for fruit-picking jobs in the provinces. It was created in response to labour shortages. While under the scheme employers must give New Zealand citizens hiring priority, few citizens are moving to rural towns to take up the low wage work.

In many ways the scheme has been hugely positive for Pacific island coun-

tries, for which labour could be considered an export, but workers who come here are at risk of the all too frequent abuses of migrant labour: underpayment of wages, violation of labour laws, substandard accommodation, and the threat of deportation if they complain about any of the above.

One seemingly ridiculous example of the tight control RSE workers are put under is the actions following a group of Vanuatu workers entertaining people at a multi-cultural day in Nelson. This activity, as well as busking at weekend markets, was deemed to be illegal secondary employment, as the workers were only here to pick fruit. Presumably, these workers are not among Michael Woodhouse's "hundreds of examples" of people who have access to him.

Giving workers from the Pacific the same rights in New Zealand as Australians would not immediately stop the abuses happening to RSE workers, but it would remove the threat of deportation and in doing so make it easier for those workers to join unions and have grievances addressed. At the very least it would mean no one stopping them from busking on their day off. Taking the side of migrant workers is a principled stand in an election year where the Labour Party is hoping to ride a wave of anti-immigrant populism by talking of cutting immigrant numbers from the current 31,000 per year to somewhere between 5000 and 15,000. NZ First has gone further with a policy to ban migrants from living in the major cities until they have been in the country for five years, and the Greens have been largely silent on the issue. In this instance MANA is showing itself to be a genuine party of the dispossessed.



# Maoridom and Marxism



Hone Harawira speaking at the *Capitalism: Not Our Future* conference

*By Joshua James. Originally published by Salient, student newspaper of Victoria University of Wellington.*

I should warn the reader, I'm a Marxist. Unashamedly and unapologetically. I believe that groups in society are oppressed, marginalised and disenfranchised by the capitalist class in order for them to keep their profit margins high and revolutionary thoughts low. I'm also Māori, albeit not visibly: I'm a light skin from Ngāti Whātua. I grew up as Pākehā as possible, but have recently started to learn Te Reo Māori and have recently added Māori Studies as a major in my degree.

Marx opens *The Communist Manifesto* with the line "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles", and that is most certainly true for our post-colonial history. There is the myth that the first settlers to arrive in Aotearoa wanted to escape the class system that existed

in England; however, I would suggest that they moved here to set up their own class system – with them at the top and Māori at the bottom. These settlers, some of whom are my ancestors, exploited Māori and our taonga and sent the profits back to the European continent. We saw European powers doing this to all of their colonies: they export raw goods from their colonies on the cheap and turn it into goods to either consume themselves, or sell it back to their colonies at a premium. This is capitalism in practice, profits at any cost. The exploitation of Māori was only possible once the Crown and private companies had alienated Māori from the land – this was done through an influx of settlers, confiscation of land, and buying Māori land at vastly undervalued prices. Once Māori had little land ownership, it was easy for the capitalist class to further their exploitation, because Māori had lost their ability to 'live off the land,' so they had to partake in wage slavery just to get by.

It is only partially useful to use Marx to look at the history of our colonisation and exploitation; we must also use his theories to look at the future for the Aotearoa we could live in. Under Marxism, we could have iwi and hapu having autonomous kaitiakitanga of our taonga and resources. We would no longer be wage slaves. There wouldn't be any 40-hour working week, because we would only need to work as much as we needed to get by. The degradation and degeneration of our environment would also cease – no companies would be allowed to pollute, because under Marxism, there is recognition of taiao. This isn't some sort of silly dream: this is a very possible reality. It would require a combined Māori and Pākehā effort to rise up against the hand that feeds us (even as it robs us). For all Māori to truly live a good life, we must absolutely reject capitalism and its notion of profit before people and the planet. Capitalism can't be tamed or restrained, only smashed by the workers of the world.



# History

## They Will Never Crush Out the Union! The Role of Women in the 1890 Maritime Strike

*By Ciaran Doolin. Originally published in UC Femsoc's What She Said.*

By 1889 women workers in New Zealand had established their first industrial organisation, the Tailoresses' Union. Lead by Harriet Morison, the union delivered marked increases in wages and substantive improvements in working conditions. The union was influential in the suffragette movement, achieving a harmony between political and industrial functions that contemporary male unions struggled to match. The tailoresses had overcome the prejudices of their employers and the labour movement, and demonstrated that women were eminently capable of industrial self-organisation. However, most women workers remained unorganised, their lives characterised by drudgery and exploitation. Strikes intensified these conditions. Nonetheless, many working-class women saw the security of their families as integrally tied to the fortunes of the labour movement and backed their husbands when they 'went out'. The Maritime Strike which rocked Australasia during 1890 saw these tensions between the different perceptions of the role of women come to a head. The rise of class conscious 'New Unionism' ran in parallel to a feminist upsurge.

The 1890 Maritime Strike is one of cornerstones of industrial history memorialised by the Australasian labour movement. It had its origins in the development of the class conscious 'New Unionism' which swept the world after the dramatic London Dockers' Strike of 1889. This new approach to organising promoted the solidarity of labour over the loyalties of craft. As one New Zealand Watersiders' leader declared in the 1890s, "We [workers] have no flag, we have no country". Their loyalty was,

instead, to their union and their class.

The upsurge in union activism during the late 1880s put the employers on the offensive, and the unions saw their rights as under threat. As an historian of the period, J. D. Salmond, puts it, "All the bad feeling between employers and workers in New Zealand which had been accumulating for years and had found only occasional means of escape, came to the surface. It was an industrial war pure and simple." By international standards the strike was huge, still more

“the first seeds of feminism had been sewn and these were later to blossom into a powerful social force.

so considering the small populations of the two colonies. In all, 60,000 workers (with 200,000 dependents), went on strike, compared to 100,000 in London.

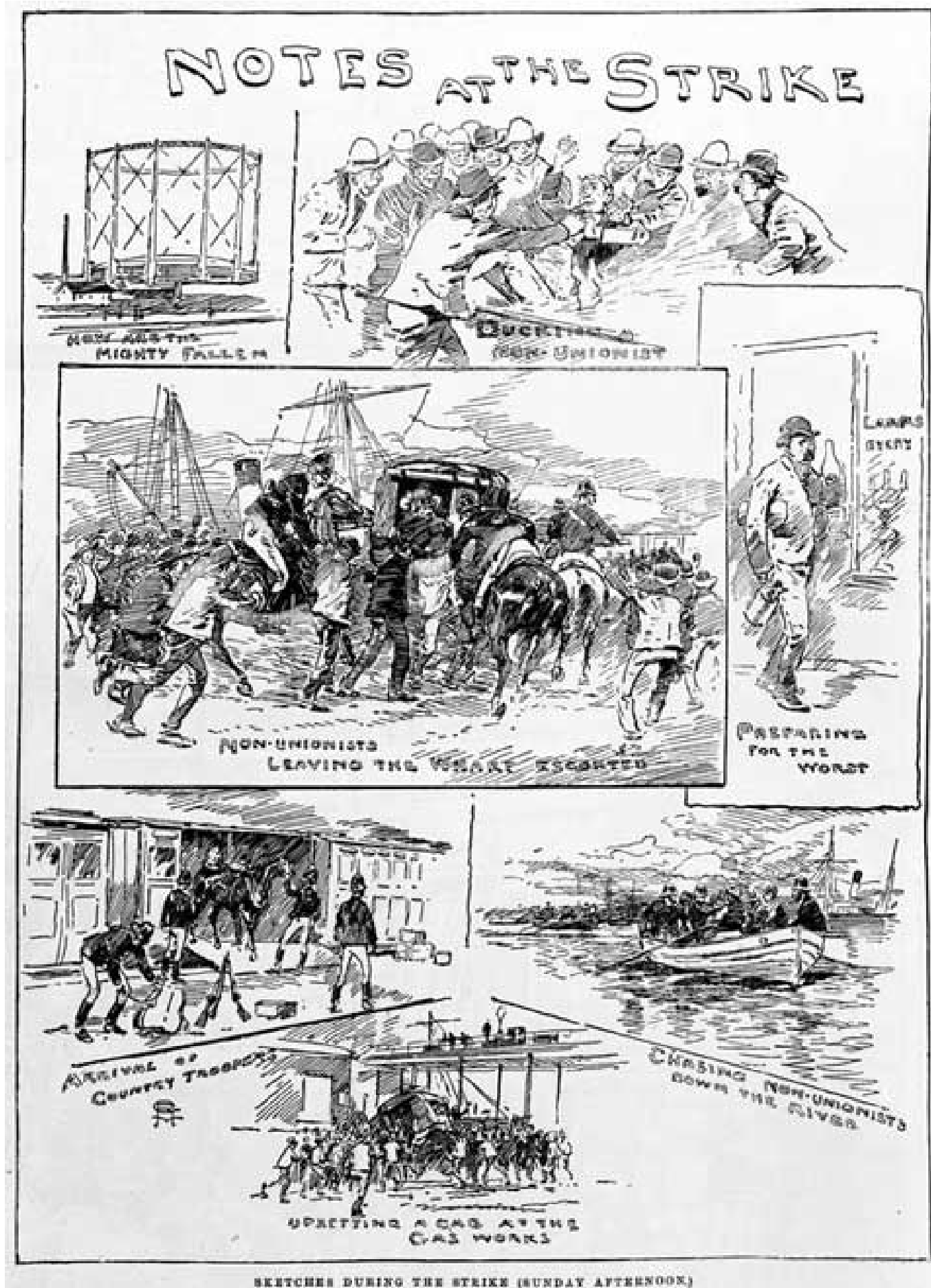
The direct precursor to the Maritime Strike was a dispute between the Typographical Association and the employers Whitcombe and Tombs. In October 1889, the Maritime Council, a national federation of trade unions, had been formed. It was immediately effective in settling a number of standing disputes. In early March 1890, a dispute between the Typographical Association and their employers was taken up by the Council. After the employers proved recalcitrant, the Council threatened to turn the dispute into a general strike. However, the Council retreated at the last moment and opted for a continued boycott.

Industrial tensions were thus at their apex and many in the labour movement were of the view that the very principle of unionism was under threat. It would only take a small push to take the country over the edge.

The Maritime Strike proper began in August via a dispute between the Ship-owners Association of Australia and the Marine Officers over the right of the latter to affiliate with their Maritime Council. The New Zealand Maritime Council, now affiliated with the Australian Maritime Council, pledged to stay out of the dispute provided New Zealand ships were handled by union labour. When the employers violated this, the spread of the strike to New Zealand was inevitable.

In a staggered fashion, all 22,000 New Zealand workers went out, seamen first, followed by wharf labourers and then the miners. The workers received support from surprising quarters, considering the indirect origin of the dispute. The soon-to-be Liberal premier Richard Seddon denounced as "base" the accusation that the unionists were holding the country to ransom, and he called on the farmers to join the unionists to defeat the employers. Meanwhile, the government assigned mounted police and the military to maintain 'order', while farmers and members of the urban middle class were enlisted as strike breakers. When negotiations to end the dispute proved fruitless – the employers were intent on putting an end to 'New Unionism' and refused to compromise – the strike began to fizzle. Finally on November 10, the Maritime Council formally called off the strike.

But what role did the women play in the strike? As historian Bruce Scates observes, "Feeding those families was foremost a woman's concern. Much



A cartoon of events in Australia.

# History



An early action for International Women's Day.

has been written of the strikers' valour and determination, of the way the men defied the shipping companies and the banks. We remember little of . . . the homefront: that unequal, inglorious struggle against hunger, illness and rent". Added to this 'homefront' role was the presence of a large minority of women on the front lines of the dispute: the picket line, the public meeting, the march, and the boycott.

Despite the great suffering the strike brought for women at home, many remained fiercely loyal to the cause. A mother of eight defiantly declared the bosses would never "crush out the union"; it was in "the poor folks" heart to "rebel". The government would have to "take them out, men, women and children, and shoot them down at once, one and all" before the strikers gave

in. Conservatives appealed to women to intervene for their family and home. One woman responded: "we have as much interest in the strike as our husbands have, as much to lose, and as much to gain . . . On its results depends our condition [and our ability to live] in comfort with recognised rights and fair wages or as slaves". Mary Hoarder's 'A Wives Manifesto' echoed these sentiments and went further, defying any man that put her family in jeopardy. She called for 'brave women' to seize their place in the public domain: "The women of Boston insisted on throwing the taxed tea into the sea; we will throw th[ese scabs] into the gutter and if necessary live on one meal a day . . . neither we nor our husbands will ever surrender".

Women were in the forefront of militant

strike action as well. In October, a large group of women in the Canterbury mining village of Glentunnel descended on the home of a prominent scab, Alfred Ashton, chanting 'blackleg', 'burn him' and 'bring him out'. He watched in terror as his effigy was put to the torch: "a great noise of tins rattling rose in the night". In the same month women in Dunedin lined the wharf and spat on scabs. Indeed, it was common for women to 'man' the picket, and they took part in many heated, and occasionally violent, confrontations with the police and strike-breakers. They also attended public meetings, participated in marches, and wrote letters to politicians and newspapers. The boycott was one of the most effective weapons the strikers had at hand, and women were predominantly responsible for enforc-



ing it. It was not just coal or wood that was declared black, but the butchers and bakers who fed the scabs, the boarding houses that sheltered them, the hotels that stood them drinks. In Wellington young women refused to dance near ‘blacklegs’, “lifting their skirts in unison” and “marching” from the hall.

The response of conservatives to the militancy of many women was nothing less than horror. In their view, Scates observes, “women’s forceful mobilization in the Maritime Strike was little short of madness. It was not so much the unity of the working-class men and women that angered and disturbed them but the apparent inversion of masculine and feminine roles”. A story published in the *Otago Witness* at the height of the strike illustrates this alarm. In ‘The Reign of Terror: ... or What Might Happen to a Man in the Year 2,000’, the author describes a dystopian Dunedin in the 21st century where the strikers had succeeded. Society was now organised by the unions who set wages and working conditions; “the ancient order of things...subverted”. Empowered by the vote, women now lived independently of men. The protagonist, an archetypal rugged male, is tired of the new order. In the dingy tea room where he works, he is brought before his employers, the Society of Waitresses, to apologize for asking for lunch during their tea break:

Everyone was chattering. The chairwoman was continually knocking on the desk with a small wooden hammer and crying out ‘Order!’ and ‘Silence!’ ‘There’s a man present!’ one declared. ‘Drive him out!’ demanded the others. I turned to go, when some she Devil cried ‘Duck him in the pond!’ Instantly I was set upon by about 20 strong girls, jostled, knocked down, lifted up, carried out, and hurled, amidst shouts of laughter, into a dirty pool of water.

That night a civil war breaks out across the country, and he joins a squad of men who share his disdain for the system. During the night they encounter a column of waitresses-turned-militawomen and slaughter them. “If these women have unsexed themselves and demand manhood suffrage, manhood suffrage they shall have,” one of his number cries before opening fire. That the author intertwines the two movements – feminism and labour – as well as the almost sexualised violent tone with which the story ends is indicative of how profound a threat many in the establishment saw the ‘New Woman’ of the strike.

Contemporary feminists, too, realised the significance of the moment. Going beyond the limited demands of the suffragette movement, Louisa Lawson’s journal, *The Dawn*, predicted that 10,000 women were about to go on their own strike – for the housewife’s eight-hour day. The Maritime Strike, she concluded, would prefigure a new era of gender relations. Women must break out “of the abominable seclusion” of the home, to take their place as equals in the union hall. “Union men demanding rights and liberties...must grant the same to their wives”.

However, Lawson was to be sorely disappointed. The loss of the strike severely damaged the labour movement, especially in New Zealand where unions had only just gained a footing. The Maritime Council collapsed and many unions went out of existence or were replaced by company unions. Scapegoating ensued and women were an easy target. While the role women played in industrial disputes was frequently acknowledged by unionists in the mining towns, the urban union movement had a more circumscribed attitude towards women. As the strike began to falter the stereotype of the ‘nagging wife’ became common. Moreover, as women occupied the most vulnerable position in industry, they suffered the worst from the decline of union influence. It took well over a decade before the movement regained

its power.

Despite the upsurge in feminist feeling that coincided with the Maritime Strike, the rapid progress of industrialisation and the increasing influence of the State in people’s lives combined to reinforce society’s gender prejudices and define the role of women as one of dependence and domesticity. The concept of the male ‘breadwinner’ became near universally accepted by both capital and labour, and by the State. The Arbitration Court, for example, defined the living wage in the early 20th century as the amount needed for a man to support a wife and children. Nonetheless, women were to continue to play an important, and at times leading, role in the labour movement, standing on the front lines alongside the men again during the heady period of strikes in the early 20th century. Moreover, the first seeds of feminism had been sewn and these were later to blossom into a powerful social force.

*For a general history of the New Zealand strike see J. D. Salmond, New Zealand Labour’s Pioneering Days, ed. Desmond Crowley (Auckland: Forward Press, 1950), pp. 79-94; or, for a more extensive treatment, Ian A. Merrett, A reappraisal of the 1890 maritime strike (M.A. Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1969). Maryan Street, The Scarlet Runners: Women and Industrial Action 1889-1913 (Wellington: Working Life Communications, 1993), explores the theme of this essay in more detail.*

KARL  
MARX  
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## Copyleft: Marxism, the internet and publishing

by Daphne Lawless (*Fightback*)

On 23 April, Lawrence & Wishart (L&W), publishers of the most well-known English translation of the *Collected Works* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, issued a “take-down notice” to the Marxists Internet Archive (MIA - <http://marxists.org>). L&W demanded that MIA remove from their website all the works to which L&W held copyright.

Since the late 1990s, MIA has been a vital resource for activists, making the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and hundreds of other socialist and revolutionary writers available free online worldwide. US leftist Scott McLemee, writing in *Inside Higher Ed*, describes the website like this:

“It makes available a constantly expanding array of texts by scores of writers (not all of them Marxists and some not radical by any standard) in an impressive range of languages, and all at no charge. The site draws more than a million readers per month. ... More

remarkable even than MIA’s long-term survival as an independent and volunteer-staffed institution, I think, has been its nonsectarian, non-exclusionary policy concerning what gets archived.”

The reaction to L&W’s demands from socialists and radicals all over the Internet was immediate and outraged, including a petition with thousands of signatures. L&W claimed to be shocked at this, explaining that they would be selling digital issues of the *Works* to universities and public libraries.

“Income from our copyright on this scholarly work contributes to our continuing publication programme,” stated L&W. “Infringement of this copyright has the effect of depriving a small radical publisher of the funds it needs to remain in existence.” They accused protesters of being part of “a consumer culture which expects cultural content to be delivered free to consumers, leaving cultural workers such as publishers, editors and writers unpaid”.

But MIA spokesperson David Walters responded that this was missing the point:

“We have a *political* difference with L&W ... Removing [the *Works*] from generalized Internet access and bouncing [them] ‘upstairs’ into the Academy is the opposite of ‘maintaining a public presence of the *Works*.’ It restricts access to those having current academic status at a university that is subscribing to the service...

“It is not public access. This is the opposite of the general trend toward making things available for free on the Internet ... The MIA existed from the get-go because we wanted to open up the privileged, access-only libraries at universities... The history of the workers movement should in fact be ‘free’.”

We’ve seen this argument before, in many different areas where zero-cost distribution of intellectual property such as text, video and music via the Internet is debated. On one side, the social ben-

efits of free information for all who wish to use it; on the other hand, the rights of content producers – and copyright holders – to be paid for their “intellectual property”. Who’s in the right?

## Copyright as relation of production

It’s interesting that Karl Marx – living in an era where the most advanced information technology was the printing press and the telegraph – anticipated this very question. In his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, he argued that “the material **productive** forces of society come into conflict with the existing **relations of production**”.

“Relations of production” means the social organisation of who works, who gets the goods, who gets paid and how much. New technologies lead to new relations of production, as the market and society rearrange to accommodate them; but then those new relations can hold back or strangle even newer innovations. One example would be how private cars and tarmac roads were initially a great advance on horses and muddy tracks, but the society which has grown to accommodate them holds back the next movement towards efficient public transport based on renewable energy.

In the Middle Ages, one copy of a 200-page book took weeks, even years, of work by monks and other professional hand-writers. With the printing press, a new copy can be produced and sold for maybe an hour’s pay. With the internet, the PDF and the tablet reader, the cost of a single copy of any book has been reduced to zero. This means that everyone who made their living through the old technology must adapt to change, or go out of business – in the same way that the music industry has suffered over the last ten years.

The problem is that the “intellectual property” industry got very, very rich during the 500 years that the printing press was the cutting edge. One issue

is the question of “copyright”, which is a classic example of a new relation of production. Copyright was developed 400 years ago so that authors had the sole right to decide who made copies of their work – for a period of 21 years after publication. But over the years, as authors increasingly sold their copyrights to capitalist publishing houses in exchange for a steady income, the industry pushed governments to extend copyright further and further, to protect their income stream.

Now, copyright lasts for the whole life of the author *plus several decades* – 50 years in many countries, 70 in the United States. That last extension was pushed by the Disney Corporation, which dreads the day that Mickey Mouse will become “public domain”. Now Disney is notorious for patrolling the world to protect their copyright – for example, preventing preschools in New Zealand from painting Donald Duck on their walls.

No-one should be opposed to authors, artists, and musicians having their creative rights respected and earning a living from their work. But overwhelmingly the current copyright regime benefits not the artists, but the corporates who buy their copyrights from them. Walt Disney is long dead, so it’s hard to see why the corporation that bears his name should continue to “own” his work and characters forever. Copyright – a relation of production established to help authors – has turned into a means to expropriate their property to the benefit of publishers, such as L&W.

## Hypertext

The “permanent” privatisation of written culture which the current regime established can only impoverish creativity worldwide – the “open source” argument isn’t just for computer software. In fact, the “free” culture of the Internet enables more value to be created from rearrangement of existing work.





# International



For example, the problem with traditional academic publishing is that its method of linking texts together – footnoting and references – is extremely slow compared to the “one-click” links available on a World Wide Web page. McLemee points out that reading *Capital* – which was a product of its time and place, and written in a difficult style – may be hard work for a new modern reader, without the help of Engel’s commentaries on Marx’s work.

But these commentaries are packaged together with *Capital* on MIA in a way that they were not in the original *Collected Works*, or would be in L&W’s library proposal. David Walters in the MIA statement accused L&W of a “cognitive disconnect”, wanting to “destroy [the] enhanced functionality which MIA gave to the MECW material [by] embedding it with the writings of other Marxists.” In other words, L&W’s proposal would make the works less accessible and valuable, to protect L&W’s income stream from them – a classic example of relations of production holding back productive forces.

## Prefiguring

McLemee argues, finally, that MIA

“seems to embody what Marx himself identified as the goal of his work: a society of “freely associated labour”, in which everyone gives according to ability and receives according to need.” So this website, and by extension, other free digital cultural exchange sites, are perhaps an anticipation of a communist future. And it is against this that L&W – formerly the publishing house of the Communist Party of Great Britain – have decided to make their stand for private intellectual property. The irony is delicious, and yet tragic.

It’s hard to resist James Butler’s conclusion that L&W have been “stupider than a latter-day [King] Cnut, and infinitely more craven.” You’d be hard pressed to find a better example of how new forces of production create new social groups who revolt against the old relations. Butler stunningly refutes L&W’s plea on behalf of small “radical publishers”:

“Radical publishers are a necessary evil, but they are not necessary in themselves, and no obligation exists to keep them running out of sentiment. If we accept the internet changes things, then the old models of radical distribution are likely

to change profoundly.”

It is this very “changing things” in the Internet era that L&W has tried to hold back. “Tried”, because, very soon after the controversy became public, the question became moot. The disputed Marx/Engels works suddenly “appeared” online in 50 PDFs for free download. L&W’s plan to sell digital versions of the works went up in smoke, in perhaps an hour’s worth of work by anonymous Internet forces.

Contrary to L&W, this isn’t a case of a parasitic “consumer culture” – on the Internet, everyone can be a producer and a consumer. Socialists who want to overthrow market relationships in the rest of society have a lot to learn from the new Internet commons.

Read more at:

<http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/04/30/commentary-marx-engels-collected-works-dispute>

<http://wire.novaramedia.com/2014/05/7-reasons-radical-publishers-are-getting-owned-by-the-internet/>